

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Torano Shigehisa Sanekane

*"I remember Mrs. Rita Jacintho's father [Antone Cataluna], he was a good luna. The wife would bake a cake or give him bananas and he would share these foods with us, five or six women workers. He was a kind luna. But, sometimes when I did hanawai, there was a German luna. He would just watch us all the time. I would have an uneasy feeling being watched."*

Torano Shigehisa Sanekane, the second of six children, was born on August 15, 1897. She immigrated from Hiroshima-ken, Japan to the Islands in 1917 to become the wife of Yuhei Sanekane, also from Hiroshima-ken.

Yuhei, who had arrived ten years earlier, worked as an assistant to Dr. Jiro Yoshizawa and also did some plantation labor. He spent most of his life as a clerk and order-taker for Kōloa Plantation Store. Torano did plantation field work, took in laundry, and cared for her three sons.

Now the grandmother of six, Torano resides in Lāwa'i. She is still active in senior citizens' activities and is a member of the Jodo-shu church.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Torano Shigehisa Sanekane (TS)

April 28, 1987

Kōloa, Kaua'i

BY: Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

[Note: Interview conducted in Japanese. Translation done by Judith Yamauchi.]

MK: This is an interview with Mrs. Torano Sanekane in Kōloa, Kaua'i on April 28, 1987. The interviewer is Michi Kodama-Nishimoto. The interview was conducted in Japanese.

What was your mother's name?

TS: Do you mean mine? What was it now, was it Yuka? I don't remember very well. (It was Yuka.)

MK: What was your father's name?

TS: What was his name, now. . . . Kazuo.

MK: What was his last name?

TS: Shigehisa.

MK: When were you born?

TS: It was 1897.

MK: Where were you born?

TS: Hiroshima-ken, Shobara-shi, at a place called Korematsu.

MK: How many were there in your family?

TS: There were three boys and three girls.

MK: Which number child were you?

TS: I was the third.

MK: In those days, what sort of livelihood did your parents have?

TS: They were farmers.

MK: What sorts of things did they grow?

TS: Rice and wheat--just about what we could eat ourselves.

MK: Did the others living around you have the same sort of lifestyle?

TS: They were all farmers.

MK: How was your life relative to the others?

TS: Since they were all farmers, it was abundant as far as food was concerned--since we grew it ourselves and ate it ourselves.

MK: What sorts of things did you do when you were small?

TS: Baby-sitting. Since the farm was busy, I had to baby-sit my younger brother.

MK: Other than that . . .

TS: Other than that, I didn't do much.

MK: When you weren't busy with household things, what sorts of things did you do for play?

TS: I didn't go out to play very much.

MK: What about school?

TS: I did go to school until the eighth grade. But in the end when the farm was busy, I would have to baby-sit and take my younger brother to school with me.

MK: What sorts of things did you learn in school in those days?

TS: We studied things like calligraphy, arithmetic, such as the multiplication tables, etc.

MK: I understand the girls in those days studied such things as sewing and weaving, but how was it in your case?

TS: I used to do those things.

MK: What sort of sewing did you learn?

TS: Japanese kimonos. And weaving--where you match the threads.

MK: When did you come to Hawai'i?

TS: I was in Japan until 1917, I think.

MK: Why did you come to Hawai'i?

TS: I was sent for.

MK: Who sent for you?

TS: It was after I got married. . . . I came [as a wife] for [Yuhei] Sanekane.

MK: Did you get married in Japan and then come?

TS: No, I got married at Izumo Taisha here, since I was a picture bride.

MK: What did you yourself think of being a picture bride?

TS: It was a little. . . . We were cousins. Our mothers were sisters.

MK: Before you married your husband, did you have any regrets?

TS: I knew him when we were young.

MK: Were there many other young girls in your village who came over as picture brides?

TS: That I really don't know. There were a lot of them on the boat coming over.

MK: Before you came to Hawai'i, did you have your name entered into the official family register?

TS: I had to be put into the register in order to be able to come over here. Sanekane's older brother was on the island of Hawai'i. His wife and I came over together, up to Yokohama. At Yokohama I failed a test; so I boarded one boat after she did.

MK: Were there various tests you had to take in order to come to Hawai'i?

TS: Yes, those for intestinal worms and an eye test.

MK: Were there any other tests?

TS: Nothing in particular.

MK: Before coming to Hawai'i, what sorts of things had you heard about Hawai'i?

TS: I don't remember. You mean at the immigration office?

MK: Before coming to Hawai'i, in Japan did other people talk to you about Hawai'i?

TS: No, there was nothing like that. People who had returned from

Hawai'i merely said Hawai'i was a good place.

MK: When they said Hawai'i was nice, what sorts of things did they say?

TS: I didn't really hear anything since I had no intention of coming here. (To me, Hawai'i was a strange place; I had no knowledge of life in Hawai'i.)

MK: What sorts of feelings did you have upon leaving Japan for Hawai'i?

TS: Sort of a lonely feeling. But Sanekane's older sister [i.e., TS's husband's older brother's wife] accompanied me as far as Yokohama. At that time, since we weren't in Hawai'i but by ourselves, we got along well and could talk.

MK: What was the name of the boat?

TS: I think it was Shinyo-maru (or Tenyu-maru).

MK: How was the voyage?

TS: It was easy for me because I don't get seasick. But my friends got seasick.

MK: What happened to these friends?

TS: They would be distressed so I would try to help them a little.

MK: During the voyage, what sorts of things did you do?

TS: I didn't do anything on the boat. There was (little) talking, since there were (many) people I didn't know.

MK: Your husband was Sanekane, Yuhei-san. How old was he when you got married?

TS: Our age difference is ten years. I believe I came over when I was nineteen.

MK: Please tell me a little about Sanekane, Yuhei-san's family. What sort of work did his parents do?

TS: Farm work.

MK: How much education did he have?

TS: I don't know since I never went to his house before he came here.

MK: How old was your husband when he came to Hawai'i?

TS: I don't know how old he was, probably about eighteen.

MK: So he had been in Hawai'i about ten years before you came.

TS: Yes.

MK: What was his purpose in coming?

TS: He came to work.

MK: What sort of work did he do?

TS: In the beginning, he worked in the cane fields of a sugar plantation.

MK: After that?

TS: After that he worked for a store--the plantation store.

MK: You mentioned before that he worked for Dr. [Jiro] Yoshizawa . . .

TS: Yes, he stayed at Dr. Yoshizawa's. First he worked for the plantation; then he quit that and went to Dr. Yoshizawa's; and then he quit that and returned again to the plantation.

MK: Where was he working when you got married?

TS: At Dr. Yoshizawa's.

MK: Where did this Dr. Yoshizawa have his office?

TS: In Kōloa.

MK: What sort of work did your husband do?

TS: He was a doctor's assistant. He would drive the car and carry his medical bags, etc.; and when they were busy, he would help in whatever way he could.

MK: How many doctors were there in Kōloa at that time . . . at the beginning?

TS: There were this doctor and the plantation doctor, a Dr. [A. H.] Waterhouse.

MK: Just two? What sorts of illnesses were there?

TS: The usual colds and such. Whooping cough among the children.

MK: You said he later entered sugarcane work. Why did he quit his job with Dr. Yoshizawa and go into sugarcane work?

TS: Because I would go to work at the plantation. So he left Dr. Yoshizawa and went to work at the plantation again. After he went to the plantation, perhaps about a month later, he was invited to work at the [Kōloa Plantation] Store, so he went there.

MK: When you say "store," do you mean the Kōloa Plantation Store?

TS: Yes.

MK: Where was that located?

TS: Where the Big Save [Value Center in Kōloa] now stands.

MK: What was your husband's job?

TS: He would go out to take orders and deliver them.

MK: What sort of work does a chūmon-tori do?

TS: He takes the order and returns to the store and fills the order and delivers it and at that time takes some more orders and returns again.

MK: What sort of places did these chūmon-tori go in Kōloa?

TS: My husband used to go toward Kalāheo and Lāwa'i.

MK: Kalāheo and Lāwa'i?

TS: Yes, he went around in that area.

MK: Did you hear any interesting stories he might have had on his rounds?

TS: I didn't hear anything like that.

MK: Did he have any difficult experiences?

TS: Yes, he must have had when he was collecting the bills.

MK: He had difficulty collecting?

TS: Yes, because the Kalāheo area is mostly made up of workers who [independently] grow pineapples, etc.

MK: Were they mainly Japanese?

TS: No, there were also gaijin.

MK: How did your husband, who was from Japan, communicate?

TS: He just somehow understood. He used to work at the plantation with the lunas so. . . . In those days, they were all Germans. The lunas and bosses were all Germans. When we came they were all Germans. (The lunas used to say, "Go ahead, go ahead.")

MK: What sort of pay did he receive as an order-taker?

TS: You mean, what he brought home?

MK: Yes, his pay?

TS: I don't know how much it was.

MK: Among the order-takers, were there others besides Sanekane-san?

TS: Yes, there were some who made the rounds of the Kōloa area. And some who went elsewhere.

MK: Do you remember the names of any of the other order-takers?

TS: There was a Kobayashi-san [Riuichi Kobayashi]. In the camp area there was Isoda-san [I. Isoda] too. Who else was there now . . .

MK: Who was your husband's boss?

TS: That was a Caucasian if you mean the [Kōloa] Plantation [Store] boss.

MK: Do you remember his name?

TS: [Homer] Maxey.

MK: Maxey. Mr. Maxey. What sort of work did you do at the time your husband took orders for the plantation store?

TS: Me? I went to work in the cane fields of the plantation.

MK: Can you explain a little of what this plantation work involved? What sorts of things did you do?

TS: From the beginning. . . . Sometimes I would pick the seed sugarcane and put them into bags and haul the bags to the train tracks. And I would irrigate and if the cane were still small, I would try not to crush them while watering. If the water were blocked off, I would make a path for the water to get through. I would do various things on the plantation. (I remember Mrs. Rita Jacintho's father, [Antone Cataluna], he was a good luna. The wife would bake a cake or give him bananas and he would share these foods with us, five or six women workers. He was a kind luna. But, sometimes when I did hanawai, there was a German luna. He would just watch us all the time. I would have an uneasy feeling being watched.)

MK: You mentioned previously that you took in laundry.

TS: Yes, I did.

MK: Please explain what was involved in doing laundry work.

TS: It was work for a doctor--actually dentist, his laundry. And that for the Filipinos. After the war [World War II] started, on the



other side of where I lived there was a bakery for the soldiers, I did their laundry.

MK: Who was the dentist?

TS: He was a Chinese. His name was Dr. Chun. [TS may mean Dr. H. G. Chang or Dr. P. W. Chung.]

MK: Dr. Chun. How many Filipino workers' laundry did you do?

TS: Filipinos were in our camp, two or three of them.

MK: How many soldiers' laundry did you do?

TS: About two. I did that and the bakery's. I did that until they went home. Because they brought it over.

MK: How much for one piece?

TS: Five cents for each piece.

MK: For shirts as well as pants?

TS: Pants were ten cents. Underwear was five cents.

MK: Did you do laundry at home every day?

TS: Not every day. I did theirs once a week.

MK: So you took their week's laundry and . . .

TS: I would take their week's laundry and. . . . There were some who brought the clothes when they came to pick it up. There were some who brought theirs in on Monday morning.

MK: So you washed it and ironed it? For ironing, did you use charcoal?

TS: Yes, charcoal.

MK: So you did charcoal ironing?

TS: In the old days there weren't any machines, so boiled it and took it out by hand. (I boiled the clothes in an old oil tin, scrubbed the clothes, put on starch, and ironed with a charcoal iron. I didn't receive much pay. Usually the Filipinos paid but sometimes they didn't. They ran away to Honolulu.)

MK: At the beginning where did you live in Kōloa?

TS: At a house a little above that street over there. When I first came, you know that Sueoka-san's store over there, I had a house behind there. We rented a house there. There's no house there now.

MK: So initially you had a house behind Sueoka-san's store.

TS: Yes, a rental.

MK: Was that Dr. Yoshizawa's . . .

TS: No, it wasn't.

MK: . . . when your husband was working for Dr. Yoshizawa?

TS: Since my husband was working there [at Dr. Yoshizawa's], I went from there to work on the plantation.

MK: It was after this that you went to the camp?

TS: He quit his job and we moved to the camp house. We went to the plantation house. The plantation house was free, you see. So we went there and went to work in Māhā'ulepū.

MK: Māhā'ulepū?

TS: You know that high mountain over there? At the foot of it. That's where we used to go.

MK: Where was the plantation camp house?

TS: You can't tell now, since it's been cleared up.

MK: What sort of house was the plantation camp house? Could you describe it a little?

TS: It was an ordinary house. Two families to a house with a partition in between. There was the bedroom and two rooms, a parlor and a kitchen. There was a kitchen over here and then a door leading to the kitchen and the parlor over there.

MK: Was there electricity or water in the houses of those days?

TS: Yes, through pipes. They made it so that water came out of the pipes. There wasn't any electricity. Lamps were used.

MK: Kerosene lamps?

TS: Stoves and lamps were all kerosene.

MK: What sorts of things were in Kōloa town in those days?

TS: There was a dry goods store, a senbei store, and also a fish shop.

MK: What else?

TS: Above this was a barbershop, a store. Also a butcher shop.

MK: In those days, did you go out to Kōloa town to do your shopping?  
Not the Kōloa Plantation Store, but at the various shops.

TS: Well, the Kōloa [Plantation] Store had just about everything in one place, so I usually went there. In those days, we didn't need very much since there was just the two of us.

MK: In those days, within the camp did you have get-togethers with your neighbors?

TS: We did sometimes. But after coming home from work, I had to cook and wash so it would be too late. We would have to go bathe at the furo-ya--some had their own baths, but I used to go to the bathhouse after coming home from work. I wouldn't get home from work until about five [o'clock], so with the cooking and all, there wouldn't be time to be chatting with neighbors.

MK: What sorts of things did you cook?

TS: Fish, since it was cheaper. If I bought fish and there was some left over, I would salt it to preserve it. I would also buy meat.

MK: So you would make your box lunches or prepare for the evening meal?

TS: After eating the evening meal, I would put the leftover rice in one of those round metal lunch containers. In the morning, everything would have to be prepared ahead for if I overslept a little, I would miss the train. (I had to wake up at two or three o'clock in the morning so I had to have the lunch and tea ready.)

MK: That's right, you took the train . . .

TS: I went by train, on the morning train. I'd go by train and also return by train. I'd have to be out at the train stop by five [o'clock] [a.m.] because if I were late, I'd have to walk.

MK: Were you ever late?

TS: No.

MK: In those days, in order to get ready for work, what sort of clothing did you wear?

TS: I would make the shirt and my hakama which I wore to work.

MK: What about a hand-protector?

TS: Yes, I'd put that on too.

MK: And tabis?

TS: Yes.

- MK: Did you make the hand-protectors and tabis by yourself?
- TS: Yes, I made them myself.
- MK: Were these hand-protectors Japanese style?
- TS: Yes, they were Japanese style. I would take the form for the tabis, too, from Japanese patterns and sew up the sides.
- MK: It must have been quite a chore to get ready.
- TS: Getting ready was a chore. You can't get by with just one layer, since you had to wash it. You had to have a least two layers. Sometimes it would get wet from rain . . .
- MK: So you didn't have much opportunity to chat with your neighbors?
- TS: If I saw them on Sunday, I would talk with them.
- MK: What about on, for example, the Emperor's birthday, or New Year's, or the Bon Festival?
- TS: Things were lively during New Year's, because people would come to make their New Year's calls. You know how people make their rounds during New Year's?
- MK: Did people visit only among their close friends?
- TS: Yes, only our friends came.
- MK: What about on the Emperor's birthday?
- TS: They celebrated the Emperor's birthday at the schools. I seldom went.
- MK: What about during O-bon?
- TS: If there was some service or something, I would attend. It wasn't anything like today.
- MK: Did you use a midwife for your childbirth?
- TS: Yes, we asked for a midwife.
- MK: Who was the midwife?
- TS: She was a friend (Mrs. Sako). The woman had done this sort of work for a long time. Dr. [A. H.] Waterhouse was relieved knowing that she was attending me (because Mrs. Sako had done it for many women in many places).
- MK: So all three of your children were delivered by midwife?

TS: Yes.

MK: After you had your children, did you continue working?

TS: No, I quit the plantation.

MK: Is that when you started taking in laundry?

TS: Yes.

MK: How did you manage with the laundry as well as the children?

TS: Sometimes, I would carry my child on my back and work. (The children would play around the house.)

MK: What school did your children attend?

TS: To the Kōloa School.

MK: Kōloa Elementary School?

TS: It was just over there.

MK: After that Kaua'i . . .

TS: After that there was a carpenter's trade school in California, so the oldest went there. The second one went into mechanics. The youngest went to [Kaua'i] High School in Līhu'e.

MK: As your children grew up, what sort of hopes did you have for them as a mother?

TS: I wanted them to be gentle mannered, and fortunately they are. After the war [World War II] started, in September, the oldest boy [Takeru Sanekane] went out. And in March, the second boy [Shuji Sanekane] went out--the oldest went to Italy, the second went to Okinawa, and the third [Glen Yoneto Sanekane] went to Germany.

MK: You must have been worried throughout the wartime.

TS: I certainly did.

MK: Soldiers also came to Kōloa, didn't they? How was it in Kōloa?

TS: Nothing much. As far as soldiers are concerned, we just had the military corps at the temples and those at the bakery. The soldiers didn't come--only when the person from the bakery brought over the laundry would I talk with him a little.

MK: Being a Japanese, did anything happen to you during the war?

TS: My husband was checked out a little, but he was not taken away. (He was checked by the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation]. They

talked to my husband outside the plantation store.)

MK: Why was your husband investigated?

TS: In order to check his records in Japan--he was registered [as a citizen] there and . . .

MK: But nothing happened?

TS: Nothing. We had no trouble.

MK: Later on you all went to Lāwa'i?

TS: After all the children had come home [from the war] we went to Lāwa'i. We had already bought land there previously.

MK: Why did you go to Lāwa'i and not stay in Kōloa?

TS: Because we built a house on the land and if we stayed here we would have to pay rent. If we built a house there, we wouldn't have to pay rent. It would be our own house.

MK: What sort of place was Lāwa'i in those days?

TS: It wasn't very different. Just that there are more houses now--in those days there were fewer houses.

MK: Was there anything like a town in Lāwa'i in those days?

TS: There was no town, just like today. There were fewer houses since there is a lot of house building these days.

MK: Is that the only difference? Up to now, you have continually been commuting to Kōloa. What has changed the most about Kōloa compared to what it was before?

TS: Only that the camp, the old houses disappeared and new ones were built, making us wonder where the previous ones used to stand.

MK: With such changes, what do you think when you compare the old days to today?

TS: It's a little more bustling today.

MK: You have lived in Hawai'i for decades now. What do you think looking back on your long years here?

TS: I don't think things have changed very much.

MK: How would you compare your life in Japan and that here?

TS: It's better here. In Japan, we were all farmers and we had to work from morning till night.

MK: Well, we'll be stopping here. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

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An Oral History  
of a  
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